

## GOVERNOR PEN PORTRAITS – 2024-25

**SUZANNE FINLAY**  
*Chair*



Suzanne is the Chair of Governors for Birches Head Academy, and is a recently retired secondary school Headteacher.

She started her teaching career as a primary school teacher for 9 years, and then moved to secondary education where she taught music. and then developed a wider interest in school leadership. After taking leading roles as Head of Year and Head of Sixth Form, Suzanne enjoyed her next 20 years as a senior leader in various schools across Wirral, St Helens, Warrington and Manchester. She completed her 38 year career as the inaugural Headteacher for 7 years of a brand new secondary school, close to the city centre of Manchester. She feels very privileged to have led a secondary school through its first years of growth in the heart of a vibrant multicultural community, and is extremely proud to have established such a successful and popular school for local children.

Suzanne has worked in several deprived areas as well as in an affluent school, and remains steadfastly passionate that all children should receive the very best quality of education, whatever their starting point in life.

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**REV. JAMES GANDON**  
**Vice Chair**



Reverend James is a co-opted member of the Birches Head Academy governing body and is the vicar at St Andrew’s Church in Sneyd Green.

James has a keen interest in education and, working alongside the Church’s Children’s Worker, has responsibility for the Children’s and Youth ministry. He is also engaged with the local community, leading or facilitating a number of outreach projects and is involved with local schools.

As well as working and expanding his career in the UK, James has spent time volunteering abroad, heading a number of mission teams and spending several months in Brazil working on a community development project in a slum and in a prison.

James has a Diploma in Theology and Pastoral Studies from the University of Nottingham, a BSC in Psychology from the University of Leicester and a BA in Theology from Trinity College, Bristol.

**ALEX GROWCOTT**  
**Co-opted Governor**





Alex is a co-opted governor of Birches Head Academy. He became a governor to contribute to his local community, endeavouring to provide the children of Stoke-on-Trent with a world-class education.

Prior to entering the teaching profession, Alex acquired experience in a range of business development roles. Alex currently works in Stoke-on-Trent as a teacher of secondary and further education. He has also undertaken a range of middle leadership roles including Head of Year and Head of Department. In 2019 Alex was appointed a Specialist Leader of Education.

Alex has a LLB Law (Hons) Degree from The University of Wolverhampton, a PGCE and MA Education from Staffordshire University. He is continuing his love for lifelong learning by studying for the National Professional Qualification for Senior Leadership.

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<p><b>Clare Morton</b> <b>Co-opted Governor</b></p> 	<p>Clare was a parent governor. She was then moved to a co-opted vacancy.</p> <p>Clare is currently the headteacher of St Mary's CE Primary school in Tunstall.</p> <p>She holds a BA (Hons) degree in English and applied Social Studies. Clare completed a Primary PGCE in 2002 and became a Primary School teacher during that year. She has taught all age ranges from Nursery to Year 6 and has been at her current school for 19 years.</p> <p>Clare has previously been a key stage leader and Deputy Headteacher. In 2016, Clare was appointed as a Specialist Leader of Education specialising in early reading, phonics, early writing and English. She has supported many schools across the city and beyond.</p> <p>Clare took on the role of headteacher at St Mary's in March 2020, 3 days after the first National Lockdown was announced.</p>
<p><b>Mark Hinton</b> <b>Staff Governor</b></p> 	<p>Mark is a staff governor and has been the Finance Officer at Birches Head Academy for nearly 3 years.</p> <p>He has a BA (Hons) degree in Financial Services which he obtained whilst previously working for Lloyds Bank for 36 years. With them he held various roles including Bank Manager, Management Coach and as a Process Designer. He also has completed his Associate of the Chartered Institute of Banking professional qualification and is currently working towards completing the Level 4 Diploma, School Business Manager.</p> <p>Mark was previously a parent governor of Langdale Primary School when his daughters attended this school in Newcastle and he is hoping to use his experience in his new role of Staff Governor.</p>

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***Katy Wainwright***  
***Staff Governor***



Kate Wainwright grew up in Newcastle upon Tyne, then moved to Bristol to study Physics and Philosophy at Bristol University. After graduating in 2007 Kate then pursued a PGCE in Physics and Science.

Kate started her teaching career in 2008 at the Castle School in Thornbury where she acted as the NUT rep and staff governor. In 2015 the Wainwright family moved to Buxton. Prior to arriving at Birches Head Academy Kate was the second in science at The Ecclesbourne School in Duffield.

Kate is married with four children and a dog. She enjoys the outdoor lifestyle of the Peak District.

***Michelle McKenna***  
***Parent Governor***



I have lived in Stoke on Trent all my life and am myself a former student of Birches Head High School having attended from 1997 to 2002 gaining 9 GCSE's grades A\* to B. I completed further education at Burslem Sixth Form Centre and went on to study Psychology at Staffordshire University, which reflects my interest in understanding human behaviour and fostering positive relationships.

I went on to work in the banking industry, which has equipped me with valuable skills in organisation, finance and decision making. However, I would say my true fulfilment comes from my role of a mother to three, two of whom currently attend Birches Head Academy, strengthening my commitment to the school's missions and values.

I am now currently working for the Esprit Multi Academy in a nearby school and my dedication to education extends beyond my own family as I strive to create a nurturing and supportive environment for all students to thrive. I became an influential figure at BHA playing a pivotal role in introducing a parent forum aimed at enhancing communication and collaboration between parents, teachers and the school administration. Through my own initiative and leadership, the parent forum has become a valuable platform for sharing ideas, addressing concerns, and promoting a sense of unity amongst staff, parents and students. My approach to parental involvement underscores my commitment to drive positive change and improve the educational experience for all students.



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